

## **INTRODUCTION**

Like the bumper sticker says, change happens. Things *will* happen—both good things and bad things—and we really have no control over either one. People defy our plans and let us down. Circumstances bring us to our knees. Planes fly into buildings. And it all happens without our permission. Once you realize that, and stop wasting your energy trying to control a runaway horse, you'll be able to find the one power you do have, which lies in learning to respond to both the good and the bad in a way that will serve you and help to enhance the meaning of your life by bringing you more happiness, peace, and success.

We live in a world we can't control. We have cell phones, voice mail, e-mail, personal computers, and every timesaving, life-organizing device imaginable—yet we've never felt so out of control and out of time. We're stressed out, scared to death of life, closing in on death, and trying to “find ourselves” in the meantime. It seems the more we try to control all the elements in our lives, the more out of control life becomes.

The chances of turning fifty years old without ever being confronted by an “out-of-control” experience are slim to none. Issues such as a forced job change, the loss of a loved one, a sudden serious illness, a teenager on the brink, a bad marriage, or simply the realization and recognition of the physical problems that come with aging can leave us feeling out of control. And while all this is happening, our relative sense of time gives us the feeling that each year is passing more quickly than the last. So our desire for peace, purpose, and meaning becomes even more urgent. *The Power of Losing Control* confronts this human paradox by explaining how to stop wasting our precious and finite energy on what we can't control. Once we learn to bring all of that misdirected energy to what we *can* control, and learn to respond to both the good and the bad in a way that serves us, the meaning of our lives is enhanced and we find greater power, peace, and success in our lives.

The fact is that stress and anxiety are control-related issues. The degree of success or worry we feel can be directly related to how strongly we feel that if we can't control something or someone, something “bad” will happen either to us or to someone we love.

I began studying this subject in earnest in 1978. My motivation was highly personal and very compelling. I was facing a life-threatening illness and had a very limited amount of the strength and energy I would need to fight for my life. For the first time in my life I didn't have the luxury of wasting energy. But in order not to waste it, I first needed to become highly aware of what I could affect, what I could control, and what I couldn't afford to worry about because it was out of my power to control it.

I began reading and studying what the most noted psychologists, philosophers, mystics, and masters had to say about how our psychology drives our behavior. I became fascinated by the realization that our fears and fantasies never even have to come true in order to impact us in life-changing ways. The more I studied, learned, and personally experimented, the more fascinated I became by how we think, feel, and act, and how and why those thoughts, feelings, and actions affect our actual experiences.

When we understand that our essence as humans is grounded in our personally created myths or stories (as Madeleine L'Engle says, "Stories help us claim our meaning"), and that our myths drive our behavior, we begin to perceive the power of congruency and transition. Just as all businesses have a culture that is driven by their corporate myths, all individuals are micro-cultures driven by their personal myths. In this way, myth, while not necessarily true, is actually greater than truth, because it determines thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Understanding this has helped me realize how to transform the way I thought and felt in my own life in a way that may have saved my life. As a result of more than twenty years of personal study, I'm now considered a leading expert on the subject of helping people change the way they think, feel, and behave. I'm called upon as a speaker at association and sales meetings, at conferences and at conventions. I also consult with CEOs and senior level managers about how to improve the ways their companies and their employees function. My clients include American Express, Ford Motor Company, and The American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. What I say to them, however, is as applicable to private life as it is to any corporate culture.

What I speak about is both personal and universal, or, as a client once put it to me, "There are many people out there who claim to be experts on one thing or another they've never personally experienced. And there are also plenty of people who've

survived many challenges but have never figured out how to use their experiences to find a better meaning for themselves, let alone how to communicate that understanding to others. You, however, are like an expert on the subject of the *Titanic* who's also a survivor of the shipwreck.”

When I'm called upon to meet with corporate executives and staff, I may not know anything about their specific business, and I certainly wouldn't consider myself qualified to tell them how to run it. What I can do, however, is to help them see and think about *themselves* differently within the framework or context of their business.

One basic truth I've learned is that none of us can stand in another person's shoes or view the world through another person's eyes. We all see our world reflected in ourselves and ourselves as a reflection of our world. And so, by shifting the perspective from which we view the world, we'll also be seeing ourselves differently. My role is to facilitate that change in perspective. I help people to see differently, which will automatically allow them to respond differently to what they see.

I've learned that most people believe that learning and growth come from looking at something new and seeing the familiar in it, but it's the opposite that's actually true. When we see the familiar world differently, we will behave differently in it because it simply isn't possible to respond in a way that isn't congruent with what we see and still remain sane. If you've tried to change your behavior without first changing your perspective, you've probably met with some form of failure.

I rarely speak at events that are open to the public, and so, although I do write a column for a local newspaper and I am heard on local radio each morning, the executives and CEOs of the companies that hire me have, until now, effectively determined and limited the number of people who are able to hear what I have to say. For the first time, with this book, I am able share what I've learned with a much wider audience and act as a kind of personal consultant to each and every reader.

I don't know if what I've written will be motivating for you, because I don't know what motivates you. But I do know that what you'll find in these pages is information and advice that's been tested in “real life” circumstances and that has helped me, personally, as well as my clients to find power in a world that's beyond our control.

In this book, I'll be sharing some stories from my own life and from my professional experience as I explain how we can learn to rewrite the myths that shape our lives. If I could summarize in a nutshell the wisdom I've gained from my life's study and my work, it's simply this: We live in an out-of-control world, and there's nothing we can do to change that fact. But the success and happiness we all seek isn't out of our control. And the key to finding it lies in our ability to know how to accept what we can't control and bring all of our energy to what we can. This is when our energy turns to power. It's *The Power of Losing Control*.